

Town of Tyringham

Planning Board Meeting

7:00 PM July 8, 2015

Town Hall, Tyringham, MA 01264

Approved Minutes

In Attendance: Christina Alsop, Michael Curtin, Holly Kedron, April Roche, Mark Curtin

Public Present: Tonio Palmer, Larry Bravo, Robin Almgrem, Steve Cohen, Marcy Cammel, Alan Wilcox, John Demos, Sarah Hudson

Information Session Minutes: Tonight's meeting was an information session regarding the proposed wind and solar bylaws. The session begun with introductions of the public attendees and the Planning Board members. Christina provided background information, an overview of the bylaws. She highlighted the proposed bylaws' focus on agricultural, residential use, but prohibiting industrial solar/wind. Robin Almgrehm also provided some background. Christina shared the purpose of tonight's meeting around eliciting feedback from the town about various aspects of the bylaws. She shared the board's most recent discussion about potentially adjusting the acreage size for solar from 3 acres to 2 acres. Mike Curtin shared info from Matt Puntin related to the potential need for 15-17 acres of open land for 5 acres of solar array. One attendee asked what the risk of litigation might be if state views our bylaw as too limiting. Holly shared that Brian Domina of Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) advised the board that 2 acres is reasonable limit for Tyringham.

Steve Cohen opened the discussion by asking about the basis of creating the bylaws. Board members highlighted the potential for large solar or wind projects to emerge without the town having oversight for the projects if bylaws don't exist. The group also discussed the pros and cons to wind and solar energy, distinguishing between large scale and small scale. The concerns included whether or not property values might be affected, aesthetics, and potential environmental impact of large scale wind energy. Potential benefits discussed included lower energy costs and income generated by the solar or wind power. Various attendees spoke about their thoughts on these topics. Robin shared information about green energy regulations that could potentially "skip over" town zoning if town zoning is seen as too restrictive on solar. She highlighted that in MA, towns cannot outlaw solar.

Tonio Palmer shared that he has already been approached by commercial proposal for solar, making the potential for unregulated solar a pertinent issue for the town. Smart Solar LLC approached him about leasing 5 acres for 20 years, offering \$30K per year in rent. The proposal would involve the selling power back to the townspeople at a fixed rate which is lower than market price. The group discussed the acreage size and potential for others to be approached. Tonio noted that Smart Solar LLC said solar panels can't go on APR land, and that it is not that easy to find suitable land. Various attendees had questions about the 5 acre proposal and the proposed bylaw's acreage restriction. People wondered if such companies would or would not pursue smaller acreage projects.

Christina asked about public's opinion of industrial solar in Tyringham. Tonio expressed interest in areas not visible or less impactful such as along roads or at the dump. The group agreed that it is a complex issue. Steve Cohen expressed idea about potential of solar to pay for broadband costs. Sarah Hudson expressed preference for solar on buildings rather than on land. Holly expressed less concern for aesthetics, referencing preventing farms from dying out and keeping land open in town. The question of how abutters might respond was mentioned. Tonio thought perhaps there may be creative ways to lay out solar that don't take up one large field. Steve also discussed potential of a town solar project to generate income for the town to replace highway equipment. Mike pointed out the difference between a town project and individual land owners. Robin discussed that bylaw was crafted to honor residential & agricultural solar use. Tonio shared that through Municipal Lighting Plant (MLP), the town could potentially be a generator of electricity. He also expressed his belief that the Smart Solar proposed project is a hybrid approach – not fully commercial, because in the proposal neighbors would buy the power rather than it being sold to the grid.

There was further discussion about solar power in general. Larry Bravo shared his experience with solar, referencing solar along MA pike. He wasn't aware of any current pursuit of large projects in this area. He asked if there is a tax liability involved in placing solar array on property. Mike shared that solar needs building permit and is considered a structure. A question was posed about whether or not a solar array would impact the land being viewed as building lot. Christina shared that MA has reached cap on national grid buying back solar, however there could be potential for limit to be raised by government or for the new subsidy to change.

The discussion then moved to wind energy bylaw. Christina reported that the state has not so far mandated wind (unlike the mandate preventing the outlawing of solar). Holly cited Brian Domina from BRPC reporting that the move was away from wind because the Berkshires are not suitable for wind due to it being difficult to build and maintain the large structures. The Board reviewed that the proposed bylaw would prohibit commercial wind energy. Al Wilcox expressed support for limited wind energy in Tyringham. Al expressed preference for solar to wind. The board highlighted points from the bylaw, specifically around that 100' height restriction. This limit was arrived at based on the height of trees in town. Holly noted the WiSpring tower, which is 120' due to the 100' tree line in Tyringham. The Board emphasized that the bylaw allows for residential/agricultural small scale wind use. Christina asked specifically for any concerns about the height limit and no concerns were expressed.

Christina thanked the townspeople for attending. Larry Bravo thanked the board for working to protect the character of Tyringham. Steve Cohen asked about the town government's long range planning, and Christina noted that this would make a good discussion topic between the Planning Board and Selectmen.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:00 PM

Our next meeting will be July 15, 2015

Respectfully submitted, April Slater Roche